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California State Senate
SELECT COMMITTEE ON
CALIFORNIA, ARMENIA AND ARTSAKH
MUTUAL TRADE, ART AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE
SENATOR ANTHONY J. PORTANTINO
CHAIR

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January 24, 2018

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to respectfully urge you not to join or support the California Azerbaijan Friendship Association (CAFA). CAFA is a newly-created lobbying and PR effort put forth by the Azeri Government. Given the country's extensive history of human rights abuses, as well as its unremitting and senseless attacks on the people of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic commonly referred to as Artsakh, California should not be party to or associate with this Public Relations effort.

In the way of background: California formally recognizes the Armenian Genocide as a historic truth. In addition, in 2014, California formally voted to recognize Artsakh as an autonomous nation. And, in 2017, the California State Senate Rules Committee established the Select Committee on California, Armenia and Artsakh Trade Art & Cultural Exchange. Artsakh is an autonomous territory landlocked between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is composed almost entirely of ethnic Armenians. Since gaining independence in 1994, the country has seen consistent and ongoing aggression from the Azeri government -- which hopes to regain control over the land and the Armenian people in the region.

Please don't be taken in by Azeris' claims and efforts. Despite calls for cooperation, the group's true purpose is to continue to bolster the oil-rich country at the expense of its Armenian neighbors with your help.

The following timeline illustrates the worrisome trend of unprovoked aggression by the Azeris toward Armenia and Artsakh during a time of peace.

- April 2016 saw the largest escalation of violence against Armenians since the US-brokered a ceasefire agreement of 1994. Azerbaijan launched an unprovoked 4-day attack on Nagorno-Karabakh, killing 99 ethnic Armenians and injuring scores more.
- August 2014 President Aliyev threatened to declare war on Armenia and then ordered Azeri forces to Artsakh which resulted in casualties on both sides.
- June 2010 Azerbaijan again violated the ceasefire in unprovoked attacks against Armenians.

- March 2008 shootings along the line of contact increased, as President Aliyev made clear that Azerbaijan would use force if necessary to regain control of lost territories.
- February 2004, Azeri Lieutenant, Ramil Safarov, hacked to death Armenian Lieutenant, Gurgen Markaryan, with an axe. Safarov was extradited from Hungary in 2012, after which he was pardoned and dubbed a hero by President Aliyev.
- Beginning in 1998, the Azeri government ordered the destruction of nearly all Armenian churches and cemeteries in Julfa, Nakhichevan. Julfa is a historically Armenian region located within Azerbaijan's borders. The demolition continued into 2005.

The State Legislature must strongly condemn civil rights abuses and all attacks by foreign governments on innocent people. Accordingly, it must refuse to cooperate with such governments until there is a demonstrated effort toward reconciliation. Joining the California Azerbaijan Friendship Association would in effect condone the Azeri government's acts of violence against the Armenian people of Artsakh. For the aforementioned reasons, I ask that you refrain from associating with this group.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anthony J. Portantino". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anthony" being the most prominent.

Hon. Anthony J. Portantino

Chair

Select Committee on California Armenia & Artsakh Trade Art and Culture Exchange